Table of Contents

1. ■The Prologue■
2. ■ The Long List of Allegiances ■
3. ■ The Opening First Chapter ■
4. ■ The Shocking Second Chapter ■
5. ■ The Adventurous Third Chapter ■
6. ■ The Reuniting Fourth Chapter ■
7. ■ The Dramatic Fifth Chapter ■

■The Prologue■

[image]

◆◇◆

It's a rather ordinary day for Riverclan.

No. Wait. I take that back. It was a slightly unordinary day for Riverclan.

The weather was the kind of cool and cloudy morning that comes after torrents of rain relieving some real dog days. Or drought days. Apart from the monsoon, however, was another tense highlight especially special for two cats- kits were going to be born today.

The once bone-dry bed of the life giving river encircling the island was alive with weeds and pebbles. The water itself innocently burbled, pretending that it never had been gone. The horsetails barely moved in the light mist laying on the territories like a very thick blanket. Every now and then the ripple of silvery scales betrayed the movements of fattening fish, as the shudder and rustle of grass did with watervoles.

There was one animal there, though, that to humans would be highly unlikely to try a dip.
Those humans would be shocked at their unstereotypical behaviour.

Plumpness (either from fitness or fattening),slightly oily fur, relaxed behaviour, and amiability towards water was a common trait shared by all the cats of Riverclan. This tom resembled a pike- bulkish, silver and faintly striped. He was on a largish and smoothish rock, looking at the river, but not for prey- for something very different.
"Easy, kit," he meowed. "There's no need to prove that fish aren't the only ones with gills- you're quite fine without."

"I'm not your kitten, Eelstripe, I'm your mate," the subject of his staring replied. A creamy, short-furred female with mottled black

patches turned her head to look at him. She had been smoothly striding through water barely past her paws, and dropped something she was carrying in her mouth. A spiky sort of snail shell that had a colour akin to her pelt.
She gave him an expression that a person would equivalent with raising their eyebrows. "Are you even talking to me,or...?"

Eelstripe attempted not to stare at her considerably extended abdomen.

"Both," he said, and pounced off the stone and padded up to her. He nudged her, she nudged him back, her face warming into...not a smile of course, but certainly something happy.

He looked at the shell. " Looks like you. A shiny shell. Shellshine."

"You're terrible at giving compliments." Shellshine didn't move away, however.

"Never really had anyone to give them to."

Quiet. The only sounds were the rustle of bending grasses and the gentle rolling of thunder in the distance.
But a snapping of stick, a rolling of pebble-

"You-two-are-so-gushyyy!"

The pair leapt apart as if given a shock. Eelstripe looked at Shellshine awkwardly, and the look was returned before she attempted to appear nonchalant by preening her chest fur.

Volepaw was a nosy,loud but ever caring small bundle of mousy brown fur. She also had the knack for appearing at undesirable times.
"I hope I don't ever had a mate when I grow up if I have to do the same silly stuff all the ti-"

"Thank you, Volepaw, for your entertaining commentary on what you think about certain things. Do I remember Petalflame, *the deputy and your mentor*, telling you about border patrol?" Eelstripe interrupted her coolly.

"Yes but whatshisname got a headache and went so she said to tell you to come and fill in since you were near the border enough and were out anyways."

"..."

Shellshine suddenly stood and stretched luxuriously, picking up the treasure she had found in her mouth. " I believe that going to camp should be the best for me," she meowed evenly, but added in Eelstripe's ear; "Not mad at you."

Eelstripe watched her leave, her tail waving, and sighed, turning to the expectant Volepaw.
"I'm going," he meowed and got to his feet exasperatedly. "Come on, kit."

◆◇◆

Eelstripe shook the extra rodent in his jaw triumphantly as they rounded the border. Volepaw kept looking at it with a longing expression, but the tom reminded her sternly, "Nothing until we get back." She just sighed and stared some more, until finally she decided to distract herself with her favourite pastime- yakking her silly head off.

"Eelstripe do you really believe that we could find a dog and a dog pack or at least some snakes it's so boring just walking and being hungry didn't you hear about Sunningrocks yet did Thunderclan steal it again or something those mangy mouseheads are so stupid that they can't see how it was always ours do you think I could go to the Gathering because I want to see new cats not just these same old buggers around our camp do you think Shadowclan is really greedy and stuff I don't like them obviously they always want trouble like so many of the stories have Shadowclan cats making so much stupid arguments and they eat frogs for the love of Starclan and why do we go to Starclan why can't it be a real clan can you die in Starclan because you're already dead and if so what happens do you think that if a queen dies before she has kits why are you shaking your head and growling I was only asking that if a queen dies in Starclan before kitting does she have her kits there and they're all ghostly and stuff or do they come down here and

whatever hey Eelstripe the other patrollers are calling you."

Eelstripe tried his best to tune it out. "Why are you sticking with me?" he mumbled."What about Troutsplash and whoever? Aren't they also on this patrol?"

"I just said that they were coming towards you! Were you listening?"

Probably. Possibly. Maybe. Nope.

The trio of cats they left apparently behind appeared over a ridge. Eelstripe squinted at them- they must have running judging the way they wearily padded now, and how the members looked- their ears were flattened, pupils dilated, and tails were puffy.

Eelstripe dropped the vole and stared. Something prickly felt like as if it was being dragged across his back.
"*Pah!*" He spat out the dingy fur from the animal out of his mouth.

Troutsplash attempted to meet his eyes and to stop panting. Behind him, Otterleap opened her mouth, appearing to be a better condition than the other two behind her. She braced her legs.

"I..Shellsh.."

"He's already gone," Volepaw commented helpfully.

Troutsplash looked up.A cloud of sand dissolved where he had been standing just a moment before.

◆◇◆

Eelstripe listened quietly to the steady drumming of drops on the camp floor as he lay, paws tucked under his chest.
They were constant and they were water- it helped calm him down. Even if all the animals on earth were to die out, rain wouldn't dissappear. It would always be there forever, splashing merrily into the reeds and trickling down the into the river.

The nursery was the most heavily built den in the camp to help it stay anchored when the river flooded, due to it being closer to the

water than others.
The other warriors were also inside their respective den with Eelstripe. Every now and then Troutsplash would nudge him comfortingly, and Eelstripe would nudge him back. Otherwise he stared blankly at the rain, the occasional drop landing on his face and making him blink. He'd given up pacing long ago.

"How much longer?" he mumbled.

A minute...Five more...

Something stuck it's head inside the den- the welcome face of the medicine cat's apprentice, Oakpaw. Eelstripe started to get up, and to his relief Oakpaw let him.
The others watched his retreating back as Oakpaw led him out of the den silently, Eelstripe walked behind him silently and as they hurried out of the rain silently. It was feeling colder than he remembered.

The other two cats in the nursery parted around him silently as well- Dusklight, ,with two kits two moons old that were recently put to sleep, and her brother Blazelight the medicine cat. Their quiet wasn't hostile, however- on the contrary, it was congratulating. Eelstripe's hunched shoulders relaxed at long last.

Shellshine was at the corner of the den with her flank rising and dropping gradually as she dozed, curled up against three spiky-looking bundles of fur, one only three quarters the size of the others. Eelstripe stared.
"...Did I have that big a head when I was born?"

The tension broke. Blazelight flicked his ear playfully. "Dusklight always said that you kept that huge head as you grew up," he meowed.
His sister looked affronted. "I didn't say that to anybody that in my life!"
"Other than him?" Eelstripe said good-naturedly.

Dusklight looked sightly startled but quickly regained her composure. "Eelstripe?"
"Still here."

"Shellshine said she wanted to name the kittens Rainkit, Thornkit and the last one you could pick."
"I think the one named 'the last one you could pick' looks rather small," Kestrelwing commented.
Dusklight gave him a look.
"Looks like a tiny version of me," Eelstripe said quickly. "Silverkit? or Graykit?"
"Just not as shiny," commented Oakpaw behind them quietly, making the others jump."Graykit could be Graynight when grown."

"Rainkit, Thornkit, Graykit," Eelstripe mused. " I've only just seen you lot, but you're already making me proud."
"What a delightful speech, Eelstar," Blazehead said. "Let your mate alone for a bit- I have a feeling that while Shellshine loves you sleep is what she really calls for right now ."

□□□

■ The Long List of Allegiances ■

Any resemblance to original cats from the books is purely accidental.

◆◇◆

THUNDERCLAN
□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Leader:
Eaglestar ＜Stormpaw＞
♡Fawnstar♡
[(M) Black tabby with lighter stripes. Yellow eyes.]

Deputy:
Birdflight ＜Lionpaw＞
[(F) Calico. Amber eyes.]

Medicine Cat:
Mooneye
[(M) Ginger tabby. Blind.]

Warriors:
Flamefoot
♥Thrushstep♥
[(M) Reddish ginger tabby. Yellow eyes.]

Quickwing ＜Lightpaw＞
♡White-ear♡
[(M) White. Amber eyes.]

White-ear ＜Rosepaw＞
[(F) Blue-gray with white ear and brindle. Green eyes.]

Thrushstep

♥Flamefoot♥
[(F) Light brown tabby with darker stripes. Green eyes.]

Dustclaw
♡Birdflight♡
[(M) Longfurred, brown. Hetero blue and green eyes.]

Berryleaf
[(F) Gray with white paws. Blue eyes.]

Apprentices:
Stormpaw ＜Eaglestar＞
♡Sparrowpaw♡
[(F) Light gray with very dark brown stripes. Blue eyes.]

Lionpaw ＜Birdflight＞
[(M) Cream. Gold eyes.]

Lightpaw ＜Quickwing＞
[(M) Longfurred, light cream tabby. Gold eyes.]

Rosepaw ＜White-ear＞
[(F) Brown with dark brown brindle. Green eyes.]

Queens:
Cherryfox
♥Blackheart{deceased}♥
[(F) White with black blotches. Gold eyes.]

Kits:
Silverkit
{Cherryfox} 5m
[(M) Gray with black blotches. Gold eyes.]

Pricklekit
{Cherryfox} 5m
[(F) White. Green eyes.]

Redkit
{Petalstorm(deceased)} 4m
[(M) Reddish brown. Yellow eyes.]

Elders:
Nettlesting
♥Icewind♥
[(M) Silver spotted tabby. Yellow eyes.]

Icewind
♥Nettlesting♥
[(F) Offwhite. Blue eyes.]

□□□□□□□□□□□

SHADOWCLAN
□□□□□□□□□□□□

Leader:
Beetlestar
♥Birchlegs♥
[(M) Longfurred, small, light brown wih faint light cream brindle. Dark eyes.]

Deputy:
Firespots ＜Snowpaw＞
[(M) White with ginger tabby blotches. Green eyes.]

Medicine Cat:
Gorsetail ＜Rustpaw＞
[(F) Mackerel tabby with striped legs. Yellow eyes.]

Warriors:
Birchlegs
♥Beetlestar♥
[(F) Longfurred, cream tabby with white stripes. Amber eyes.]

Bluesong
♡Olivefoot♡
[(F) Gray with white belly,chest,paws. Blue eyes.]

Olivefoot
♡Gorsetail♡
[(M) Longfurred, dark brown tabby. Dark eyes.]

Ravenclaw

♥Leafpetal♥
[(M) Black, with white mitten. Blue eyes.]

Silverstorm
♥Dappleflower♥
[(M) Silver with spots. Yellow eyes.]

Dappleflower
♥Silverstorm♥
[(F) Tortoiseshell. Amber eyes.]

Ambershadow
[(M) Dirty cream with orange mantle. Amber eyes.]

Apprentices:
Snowpaw <Firespots>
[(F) White with faint creamy points. Blue eyes.]

Rustpaw <Gorsetail>
[(M) Cream with black shell. Yellow eyes.]

Sagepaw
[(M) Mottled white. Yellow eyes.]

Queens:
Leafpetal
♥Ravenclaw♥
[(F) Calico. Green eyes.]

Darkeye
♥Miststripe{deceased}♥
[(F) Light gray tabby. Dark eyes.]

Kits:
Gleamkit
{Leafpetal}2m
[(F) Black with white blotches. Yellow eyes.]

Sharpkit
{Leafpetal} 2m
[(F) Calico. Yellow eyes.]

Mistkit
{Darkeye} 3m
[(M) Gray. Dark eyes.]

Elders:
Stoneslash
[(M) Dark gray tabby. Blue eyes.]

□□□□□□□□□□

WINDCLAN
□□□□□□□□□

Leader:
Sharpstar <Rabbitpaw>
[(F) Dark brown with white unders, black ringing on tail Green eyes.]

Deputy:
Acornleap
[(M) White with brown stripes. Yellow eyes.]

Medicine Cat:
Sweetfur <Mousepaw>
[(F) Off-white with dark cream brindle. Blue eyes.]

Warriors:
Daisynose
[(F) Black. Yellow eyes.]

Harestreak
[(M) White. Yellow eyes.]

Whiteblaze
♡Acornleap♡
[(M) Gray tabby with white legs. Blue eyes.]

Skythorn <Rowanpaw>
♡Willowflame♡
[(M) Dusty brown with darker ringed tail. Green eyes.]

Willowflame <Talonpaw>

♡Skythorn♡
[(F) White with very light lavender-gray shell. Gold eyes.]

Spotpelt <Smokepaw>
♥Sagepoppy♥
[(M) Longfurred monochrome bicolour. Gold eyes.]

Honeyfrost
[(F) Cream with lighter tail and chest. Green eyes.]

Duskclaw
♥Cloudstripe♥
[(M) Dark gray with white back and tail tip. Amber eyes.]

Apprentices:
Rabbitpaw <Sharpstar>
♡Rowanpaw♡
[(M) White with darker legs,tail, muzzle. Blue eyes.]

Mousepaw <Sweetfur>
[(F) Small brown tabby. Amber eyes.]

Rowanpaw <Skythorn>
[(F) Grey tabby,with faint stripes. Amber eyes.]

Moonpaw <Willowflame>
♡Smokepaw♡
[(M) Black with gray and white brindle. Amber eyes.]

Smokepaw <Spotpelt>
♡Moonpaw♡
[(F) Gray. Yellow eyes.]

Breezepaw <Honeyfrost>
[(M) Gray brindle all over. Blue eyes.]

Queens:
Cloudstripe {expecting}
♥Duskclaw♥
[(F) Mediumfurred. Light gray with faint white stripes. Green eyes.]

Sagepoppy

♥Spotpelt♥
[(F) Calico. Heterochromic orange and yellow eyes.]

Kits:
Slatekit
{Sagepoppy} 4m
[(M) Monochrome bicolour. Hetero gold and orange eyes.]

Sootkit
{Sagepoppy}4m
[(M) White with black blotches on neck, chest, tail. Gold eyes.]

Elders:
N/A

□□□□□□□

RIVERCLAN
□□□□□□□□□□

Leader:
Fawnstar
[(F) Mediumfurred. Chestnut brown with white front toes and speckling. Green eyes.]

Deputy:
Petalflame
[(F) Longfurred. Lilac with regular dark spots and paws, ears. Yellow eyes.]

Medicine Cat:
Mapleclaw < Oakpaw >
[(M) Smallish. Brown tabby and white. Reddish amber eyes.]

Warriors:
Eelstripe
♥Shellshine♥
[(M) Large silver tabby. Green eyes.]

Troutsplash
♡Otterleap♡
[(M) Dark gray tabby with black flanks. Yellow eyes.]

Otterleap
♡Troutsplash♡
[(F) Sleek brown with black paws, tail tip. Hetero gold and blue eyes.]

Raindrip <Streampaw>
♡Mapleclaw♡
[(F) Longfurred. Blue-gray with white toes. Green eyes.]

Moonfur<Pebblepaw>
♡Mapleclaw♡
[(F) Longfurred. Shiny gray. Blue eyes.]

Shadewater<Seedpaw>
♥Dusklight♥
[(M) Smallish and longfurred. Very dark blue gray with ruddy shell. Gold eyes.]

Brownberry
♡Mapleclaw♡
[(F) Longfurred. Very light brown with cream socks, faint tail rings. Amber eyes.]

Mossfoot
♡Brownberry♡
[(M) Mediumfurred. Off white with gray right front paw and white ears. Green eyes.]

Minnowmist<Reedpaw>
♡Mapleclaw♡
[(M) Longfurred. White with black collar. Yellow eyes.]

Sunripple
♥Sandmask♥
[(M) Cream tabby with reddish ringed tail and face blaze. Amber eyes.]

Sandmask<Sparrowpaw>
♥Sunripple♥
[(F) Dirty black with cream face blaze, cream feathery tail. Gold eyes.]

Sedgewish
♡Brownberry♡
[(M) Longfurred. Gray with white brindle across back. Blue eyes.]

Dusklight
♥Shadewater♥
[(F) Mediumfurred. Blue-black with creamy white unders. Blue eyes.]

Apprentices:
Volepaw <Petalflame>
[(F) Mediumfurred. Light brown. Amber eyes.]

Seedpaw <Shadewater>
[(M) Sleek. Gray with offwhite chest and belly. Hetero amber and yellow eyes.]

Streampaw <Raindrip>
♡Pebblepaw♡
[(M) Longfurred. Light grayish lilac with white tail. Blue eyes.]

Pebblepaw <Moonfur>
♡Reedpaw♡
[(F) Mediumfurred. Gray with cream tips. Green eyes.]

Reedpaw <Minnowmist>
[(M) Mediumfurred. Gray with white unders. Blue eyes.]

Sparrowpaw <Sandmask>
[(M) Blue-gray with white unders and ruddy shell. Blue eyes.]

Queens:
Shellshine
♥Eelstripe♥
[(F) Sleek. Cream calico with white feathery tail. Gold eyes.]

Kits:
Rainkit
{Shellshine} 4m
[(F) Sleek. Blue gray with white feathery tail. Gold eyes.]

Thornkit

{Shellshine} 4m
[(M) Large. Gray tabby. Gold eyes.]

Graykit
{Shellshine} 4m
[(M) Runty silver tabby. Green eyes.]

Elders:
Stonefern
[(M) Longfurred. Black with gray muzzle, unders. Amber eyes.]

Cherrylight
[(F) Longfurred. Cream tabby. Yellow eyes.

Icefang
[(F) Mediumfurred. Blue gray with very faint tabby markings. Dark eyes.]

◆◇◆
ROGUES:
To be encountered

LONERS:
To be encountered

KITTYPETS:
To be encountered

OTHER ANIMALS:
To be encountered

■ The Opening First Chapter ■

[image]

{Here's *Rainkit- she looked positively like a mouse at first and pretty much still* does.}

◆◇◆

Rainkit was feeling snappy. It was her first apprentice ceremony- not her own, to the sadness of everybody, but *Reedkit's.*

Everybody either liked or was amused by Reedkit(except for herself and Graykit, her tiny brother)- nobody could ever ignore him when he paid a visit. He was a flashy ball of charm,fur and cunning. He used the right amount of cuteness and the nicest amount of shyness and the best amount of obedience and other sickening adjectives. Even Icefang liked him. And Icefang liked nobody, not her son, not Rainkit, her son's daughter.
Rainkit hated Reedkit.

He was too good at everything- so Rainkit was sure that he was secretly hated by everybody for his perfectness and all the favours he raked in.

Oh, there was also his brother. Sparrowkit. Nobody really noticed him- unlike his detestable brother, he was really quiet and just stuck to the shadows(or his mother) most of the time.

It would really funny if they forgot him, Rainkit thought and rolled over on her bed of springy moss. *He wouldn't even be able to say anything and remind them because he's too shy. I went and I tried to talk to him but he just squeaked and ran away so fastly. He only squeaks and runs away so fastly from me. And Thornkit. But everybody squeaks and runs away fastly from Thornkit. He's so... so big....*

She yawned- and napping Graykit had the liberty to roll over and stick her paw in her mouth.
She gasped as much as you can gasp with somebody's hand in your

mouth and tumbled away, commanding sense into her suddenly awoken feet. They felt confusingly floppy and weird after being in the same position for so long, and Rainkit tumbled unwillingly onto her larger brother.
Half tumbled- Thornkit broke her surely deathly fall and grumbled in his sleep. Hopefully his eyelids didn't actually flicker like his eyelids did right now.

She froze and waited... as Thornkit just cocked his paw a bit Rainkit got up and slid to her place in the moss. It required a lot of tamping down with her head and shuffling with the rest of her until it finally settled back into the curve of her body without having holes in it.

"Having a flop- fest, Slippy?"

She didn't bother to answer. (You don't need an answer to this voice. It's rather obvious.)

"Slippy...poor Slippy's been worn out with her worming . Quiet, little stupid head and don't flop like a trout... your personality is as dark as a thunder cloud..."

Fight Reedkit with Reedkit. "You know your mother just wants to smash in your snout," Rainkit replied, not bothering to turn over. Reedkit deserved no attention.

"Not bad... but as your mother's my mother too, that'll be rather painful to both of us," said Thornkit, from behind her. But Rainkit didn't need to see his face to read the mirth in his voice.
"I thought you were Reedkit?" (And you did too, reader. Hah.) Rainkit turned over to face him.
"Does he really say that kind of things to you?" Thornkit asked interestedly, turning over to face her.
"No. Maybe...yes." his sister replied." I shouldn't have said... he says I'm not supposed to say." To the average adult, this would be a confusing conversation. To the average sibling, this would be as confusing as not confusing at all. They tend to derive their own sort of language between them.
"And you just tell me now?"
" You were always at the other end of camp then when I wanted to.
"

She reached out for his paw and yawned, thankfully without anything in her mouth. Thornkit also did the same, catching the yawning fever.
" Mom said that if you yawn enough, you'll fall asleep," yawned Rainkit.
"I'm still tired anyways. We could give it a.."-yawn-"..try."
Thornkit yawned in response, and Rainkit yawned back.

The sleeping Graykit yawned.

Rainkit yawned.

Thornkit didn't yawn in response.

Rainkit's yawning didn't comment.

Rainpaw walked quietly with a squirrel. They were supposed to be going to the derelict Twoleg den where the solitary and majestic sparrow lived. "How much farther?" she asked.
"When you say please, you will get some fleas," It replied. Rainkit understood this as 'I'll teleport you there if you ask nicely.'
(Don't ask how she knew... In your dreams the fictional book character you have a crush on wants to marry you. Anything can happen.)

"Please?" she mewed politely, like a grownup talking to his stepmother in front of his wife. Except less fake.
"Fleas," the squirrel wolfed a nut and the sparrow sat on a random fence in front of the house.

Everything kind of... ballooned.
The thin-as-leaves trees on the side of the grassless dirt path she padded on blew out to form lilac hyper-realistic willows with stars entwined in the hanging branches. A small stream cooed in her ears as it swiftly flowed on it's path past her. Ivy grew fastly over the breaking den, which showed as much detail as the flora around. Even the shutters and broken boards which gaped like mouths and showed only dark space turned beautifully haunting.

The bird...
The sparrow sat on a fence with the whiteness all chipped like the

house. Rainkit had magically teleported to in front of the house, and a snake flew gently over the grass made of fragile lilac petals. The creature grew longer and longer as it left the side of the house, not stretching but steadily growing as it waved towards her. It curled softly around Rainkit's neck, and hummed as it rested it's head on her shoulder.

Rainkit was only staring at the bird on the fence. Usually, she doesn't like birds, as they were just feathers and bones and talked too much all the time and thus were only worth spooking, if only to see the look on their silly faces. This bird, however, would probably *pretty* her to death if she tried.

It had a red strap of the flat, soft, limp things Twolegs wore and occasionally forgot about in the river around it's head. It was bigger and more heavy-looking than other sparrows. It's feathers had tiny stars on each one, and the wind rustled them attractively.
" *Misery loves company, Bestest-future-warrior-hunter-and-everything-ever-*." it said in a voice that resembled the way her mother talked about her father's.

Rainkit's legs started to grow longer and her back became larger slightly more arched. Her neck and head and tail expanded as well, and the whiteness on her tail stretched and became whiter. Her face became less round and her eyes more slanted.
But she didn't notice, because she couldn't look at or feel it.

She stared.
"Rainkit."
"Ah-i-...yeahh?"

"... Wake up! It's Reedkit's ceremony! The one thing that you've been bothering us about all day!"

◆◇◆

Rainkit grumbled a lot as she sat neatly at the entrance of the nursery next to her two brothers- she wasn't allowed to sit with the rest because she wasn't old enough to catch her own prey yet. Graykit's eyes looked rather large in the head as he stared at the slender figure of Fawnstar sitting on a branch on the willow that's

roots provide her den, almost perfectly shadowed by the sun. Unfortunately, that meant that the sun was right behind her and it was really hard to look without getting your eyes blinded out of your head.

"I don't think I'll ever get up there..." Graykit sighed tinily, seated between his bigger siblongs. Everything he did was done tinily- which is probably not even a word."I'm just so small. "

"Even dad was as small as you when he was little," Thornkit meowed swiftly.
Graykit brightened, and Rainkit curled her tail around both toms as much at it could stretch. Even though Graykit was smaller, he was still the exact same age as the other two kittens, which didn't stop them from getting very protective about him.

Rainkit wasn't thinking about that much. She absentmindedly stared at the kits on Fawnstar's den.
Misery loves company . What does that mean? The chant of ' Reedpaw! Reedpaw!' echoed around the sedge camp- an echo in which her voice did not join. For some reason, neither did her brother's.
"Now that we have a fine new apprentice," Fawnstar trilled, silencing all the cats in the clearing, " we can get to the business of the Gathering in some days..."
*Wait, **a** fine new **apprentice?** Oh my-* " For Starclan's sake, they really did forget Sparrowkit!"
Thornkit and Graykit stared for a bit, until it clicked- "He's that quiet!" whispered Graykit.
"Won't Dusklight say something? " said Rainkit desperately.
"Dusklight's sleeping- she had a headache-"
"Then someone else- some other cat has to- we can't-"

Thornkit had a look she did not like. At all. Nope. No way.

Thunk.
Rainkit, her ears burning like fire, landed in the dirt behind the cats attending the meeting. Thornkit looked at the relatively small and kittish silhouette of Reedkit on the den, then at Fawnstar.
"Rainkit has something important to say," he announced in a cocksure tone. Everybody inconveniently stared at her. Did they

really want Rainkit to melt into a silly whimpering puddle on the floor? Why must being a public speaker be so hard?
Rainkit, never wish for the leader's den ever again!
...Misery loves company....

"You forgot Sparrowkit, " she croaked as if she had had no water for (insert impossible number here) days with unexpected feeling. It wasn't good to step on somebody and not even think it worthy to notice! Especially if it was the best looking bird in the whole-whole-wh- nevermind!

Sparrowki- Sparrowpaw stood very awkwardly to the side of the den as the attention of the riveted cats switched to him, and Rainkit felt pity- he looked even more nervous then she did and he didn't even have to say anything.

Fawnstar regained all her composure and cooed to the young cat, who tried to stare a hole in the floor to jump into and escape all the gazes. "Sparrowkit...Up to the Hightree now..."
Slowly,as if every step caused him very bad arthritis, he made his way up. During this painful time, Rainkit slipped back to Graykit and Thornkit joined them.
"How successful! " said Thornkit. "Do you think I deserve a very large reward?"
"No," Rainkit sighed, and watched Sparrowpaw climb.

"I think I do," Thornkit nicely interrupted her thoughts. "After all, I helped make a very important friendship!"
"Uh?"
"You stood up for Birdy! He's not going to forget y- that very soon!"

■ The Shocking Second Chapter ■

[image]

{ He *doesn't actually look that old- he feels as if he is,* though.}

◆◇◆

Sparrowpaw tried to hide under his moss nest. There had just been too many faces swirling up and peering at him, commenting and asking and talking until their mouths felt meaningless....

If you hid in the shadows, played an expert game of hide-and-seek, you couldn't be found and other cats just gave up trying to find someone who doesn't do anything anyway.

When you and I are grown, I'll be leader and you the deputy!

Let Reedpaw take the place at the leader's den. Cats only bothered the deputy if something was up with the leader.
Most sane,sensible cats...most cats...all cats not named..

He dug under the blackish material a bit more. The type of moss found on rocks in the in very specific conditions didn't tear as easily as other kinds, if at all.. Sparrowpaw had gathered some for the elders and the tiny nags and then took as much as he could for his own. He kept ruining it with his legs in nightmares- better to wake up in relief on a soft, springy mat than on the floor with the remains of your nest around you like...

As Sparrowpaw did not have many close ones, the dreams were not as bad. If he kept it that way, they would go away and leave him and not come back again, and again, again...

"Sparrowpaw, my brother,are you there?"
Reedpaw.
"Talk to me,okay? It's scary not knowing you can still meow, okay?"

You talk...so much...
"Sparrowpaw."
"I'm." he croaked. "Not dead."
"Don't talk about death so much, please. I have a water-rat for you."

Reedpaw padded in the den, towards the corner, where his brother and a dirty mat of moss lay curled. Reedpaw wisely stopped a foxlength away and laid the prey in his jaws at his brother's feet. Sparrowpaw didn't say anything, so he turned to leave quietly, dejectedly.

" I didn't have a nightmare last night," he mewed. Reedpaw didn't turn around, only stared hopefully at the wall with his ears pricked. Wanting him to say more. To talk more, uselessly, for no reason, for the sake of emotions, things that last a day, an hour. Sparrowpaw kept silent.

He left.

Sparrowpaw attempted to groom himself. He wasn't lying about the no-nightmares thing- he only dreamed of a weird sort of animal saying things. He never listened to what anybody in dreams said, as they only say bad things. It ended up with cats starting to say bad things, too. He never realized before how many veiled threats they exchanged. So he stopped talking, started moving to quiet places. They were dreamless, they brought real sleep.

He stopped grooming as his heart rate perked up with the thoughts of rest, the one thing he couldn't hold onto for very long...
He ignored the vole and walked slowly, surely to the quietest spot he knew of. The medicine den. To get into there, he must be hurt first...
He crawled awkwardly outside the den.

Moonfur was gossiping with Shellshine who occasionally gave her a playful nudge and hid her face .Eelstripe was with his daughter Rainkit, who was purring animatedly about something when Volepaw sidled over and poked her in the back, making her squeal and leap nearly a foxlength in the air and land square on her father.

Sparrowpaw forcefully looked away and positioned himself outside

the medicine den, and gave the quietest and but most demanding whine he could make, which wasn't easy. Hopefully Rainkit wouldn't hear.. *she's so loud.*
The ceremony....

What was she doing?

"Ah! My head hurts...really badly..somebody help? Please...." he slumped.

Sparrowpaw waited... then felt him being lifted, and relief flooded his veins- Blazelight. He grunted and swung him towards his den, the cool relief of his den, with the best moss, and shade, quiet... "Poppy," Blazelight murmured. He sighed something Sparrowpaw couldn't make out and held a dry seedhead into his vision. Sparrowpaw stuck out his tongue obediently.

"Dont mistake me for an idiot, young paw, I know why you want them," murmured Blazelight. He wasn't making any of his usual jokes and prods, just quietly, resignedly handing them over."Come back at night." He mewed something about Fawnstar, and stood over him conflictingly. Wondering if this was right.
He left.

Sparrowpaw nodded meekly and he flopped to the ground, waiting for sleep.

He impatiently tried a bit more.

The cats outside were starting to talk even more loudly than they were supposed to, and the burbling started to get closer. Sparrowpaw started to look alarmed.
The thick bunch of sedge covering the entrance of the musty cave made a sound.

Something warm curled to his side. Sparrowpaw tensed. The something curled up, examined him, and began complaining. It recieved a response and the something rolled over and yawned and put her head between his paws. Rainkit.....

The poppyseeds worked their magic and he dropped his head,

trying to belatedly tell her to shoo...she'll come in his dreams... and die a million times over....
Sparrowpaw forgot about it as he slept soundly. Poppyseeds don't give cats nightmares if given in the right amounts.

◆◇◆

Starclan knows what the *right* amount of poppy seed is.

Sparrowpaw, with the grace of a veteran, nimbly dodged the paws, the pulling grasps of cats in the ground that erupted out of the slimy black grass, trying to tug him in with them, as bones.... The more he ran, the more loose and knobbly his legs got, but if he stopped he'd be pulled in...

There was a spirit so far ahead, that seemed to keep moving away the more he dashed towards it. Sparrowpaw tried to say something, but he would he'd stop sprinting, so stopping was bad, it was dangerous..unless....

With a fluid bound, Sparrowpaw leapt up, as high as he could go. The emaciated paws of a dead cat held his tail, but it whisked free. Not needing to run in the air, he shrieked, "Come back!"
It was right there in front of him, glowing as fiercely as lightning. Sparrowpaw jumped towards it, having never gotten so far before in his life.

A wail of fury sounded. The dead formed a cupped wave of crackling black joints and spindly long feet and dying heads with white eyes and open crying mouths and skins of normal fur being tanned and stretched and cracked and dried as it came towards faster and faster and it blocked the light of the hope in front and

Somebody yelped and the warmness of the light disappeared entirely. He was half aware of being cold.
His eyes rolled open and he blinked rapidly in the light filtering into the den through tiny gaps in the sedge. He started to feel things as he grew more awake.
Someone crouched across from him. The nest was looking beaten up. He was growing colder by the moment. There's a whining feel of hunger in his stomach- which was noteworthy, as Sparrowpaw

was usually sick enough after waking to stumble into the outskirts of camp and retch, even if nothing came up.

As his eyes started to grow used to the light, the figure in front of him gained sharper edges and leaned forward. Sparrowpaw squinted.
"Having a nightmare?"
"I...w-what?"
"You shrieked. And scratched me." Rainkit sounded a little reproachful. Sparrowpaw could see three long, thin red scores down the side of her head. When she turned slightly, they vanished.
"I was asleep."
"I know. " Rainkit idly looked over his head at the back of the den, apparently inspecting the niches of various dried parts of plants . She was acting rather cool with him- barely like a kit at all.

"Sorry."
A quiet pause. Rainkit deemed him worthy enough of her attention to look at him.
"Mmh?"
"Sorry I did that." It was rather annoying to repeat yourself to somebody when you're telling them a compliment or an apology. Sparrowpaw politely kept his face neutral. It was much as he could do to someone who wasn't being sickly-sweet with him or yelling, even though she *was* yelling in a way.

Her eyes brightened considerably. "Its okay. I bite myself in my sleep."
"Why?" *Is it too much to hope that you're like me?*
" I think I'm a fish." She motioned with her paws, mimicking something large.
Sparrowpaw had to admit; her perkiness was contagious for him, possibly because he'd never caught the disease before. He got up with some difficulty and mirrored her pose, sitting on his haunches, and pulled a face." Not whitefish?"

Rainkit scrunched up her nose. "Even Graykit wouldnt."
"And he eats everything. Fish, vole, frog, rock, his tail."
"He's still so small. " she sighed.
She studied his face.

Sparrowpaw only now noticed that she was speaking in rather clipped sentences with him, using as little words as possible. While it wasn't the same as somebody who naturally spoke like that and knew the reason why, at least it was something.

Sparrowpaw stared at Rainkit. She was as big as him despite being two moons the younger. At least she wasn't as big as Thornkit... he seemed to eat half of the fresh-kill in the Clan. How was he going to go through leaf-bare?
Rainkit looked back at him with her eyes narrowed, looking as if she wanted to say something like 'You're odd.'.
Sparrowpaw suddenly wondered if he was really as sullen and dislikable as everybody thought him to be. There was a good chance that at least one or two cats hated him. He felt uncomfortable and shifted a bit.

"I hear pawsteps," Rainkit said, breaking the gaze. "It's Sandmask. Your mentor."

◆◇◆

■ The Adventurous Third Chapter ■

◆◇◆

One might say that from then on Rainkit and Sparrowpaw became friends.

Their early interactions were something like this:

Rainkit: Gonna be an apprentice in a moon!
Sparrowpaw: *looks up from dirt drawing* *stares*
Rainkit: *heart sinks* Um, okay. I'll talk to Thornkit, then...
Sparrowpaw: No, don't.
Rainkit sits next to him.
Rainkit: What's this?
Sparrowpaw: The moon.
Rainkit: Why'd you draw it?
Sparrowpaw: *assumes don't-see-you expression* *draws more, hiding it from Rainkit*
Rainkit rolls her eyes, attempts to look at his drawing.
Sparrowpaw quickly erases it.
Quiet for a while.
Sparrowpaw looks up. Rainkit has left.

And then it turned into something like this:

Rainkit: *plops next to Sparrowpaw* Ceremony tomorrow.
Sparrowpaw: Yours?
Rainkit: Me,Graykit,Thornkit.
Sparrowpaw nods.
Sparrowpaw: I drew the moon.
Rainkit: There's blood moons, blue moons, and ...dirt moons
Sparrowpaw actually thinks that almost-joke was funny. He perks up.
Sparrowpaw: *shows her something else he drew*
Rainkit reads her name under the drawing and proceeds to draw a very bad sun.

Sparrowpaw adds his name.
A companionable silence forms and they just doodle aimlessly.
Thornkit: Hey Rainkit! Didn't you hea.....Okay, I'll just go and talk to Reedpaw?
Rainkit shows no response.
Thornkit walks away, amused.

It took a lot of coaxing and sulking on both parts for them to start another conversation like the one they had in the medicine den that day.
'There's nothing like the first meeting,' Eelstripe had said to her on some occasions. "It either sparks you with excitement and you flow like water, or you interact like two wary snakes and exchange blows one after the other until you both calm down and see the light." Perhaps, in his poetic moment, he had not noticed that his daughter was a darn kit and would rather play hide-and-seek than listen to romantic statements.

Nevertheless, she listened, even though she applied it to everybody she 'interacted' with . Each cat had their own statement, and they all were 'flows like water'- except Sparrowpaw.

It still felt a little strange when she realized that she was friends with the least friendly cat in the Clan.
When she heard his cries at night, she knew she had to do something about it as her duty as a friend- his first one. Did he have them as a kit? She didn't really notice his at all in his early days... Were they getting less frequent, or worse? He didn't always cry out, and recently Sparrowpaw had been started on poppyseeds at night. It sent him in a deeper sleep usually with no dreams, which should have been a good thing, right? But he could so used to poppy that he wouldn't live without it...

All those things surfaced in Rainkit's mind as she watched the apprentice den from the entrance of her own. She couldn't sleep at all. It was something quietening to be alone and awake very early in the night to normal cats whose names were not Sparrowpaw. The empty camp looked fragile and insignificant faced with the sun rising over the faint Highstones. It made her feel temporary. Like Sparrowpaw's nightmares.

If she didn't stop thinking about Sparrowpaw she would be here until she was a warrior. To a kit the thought of being a warrior lied in with 'someday in the really distant future'.

Rainkit neatly folded a leg under her chest and shifted onto her side as the first rays of sunlight gave the sky a blue tint and chased away the darkness. The cool morning air off water came floating silently down to the camp and settled like a thin but wide invisible blanket. Behind her somebody stirred as the cold began to settle. Rainkit twisted her neck to look back at the newly awoken Graykit. His yäw was still partially showing as he stared blearily at his larger sister. "Uh?"
"Go to sleep," she told him softly, trying not to disrupt anybody else because sulking by yourself is much more effective for one's dignity.

Too late. Graykit dropped to his haunches and inconveniently sat on Thornkit, who sneezed and jolted to his paws. After five minutes, they were sitting together with Graykit in the middle as usual.

Thornkit looked in danger of dropping off, Graykit yawned constantly and Rainkit just grumped silently while the day waxed on. At one point Minnowmist distastefully poked his nose out into the cold and just as quickly withdrew it.
Rainkit was idly staring at a warbling nightingale when she became aware that Graykit was mumbling something to her.

"...thing about Eaglestar," he mewed sleepily.
"What?"
"What?" Thornkit echoed.
"I wanna... say some...thing about Eaglestar!" his voice started to rise in accordance with his temper.
"Say," Rainkit whispered.
"He's going to meet Fawnstar at Fourtrees." Graykit cooled a bit.

Thornkit jerked his head up." Who told you?"
"Heard it from Reedpaw when he came back from the Gathering, saying to Sparrowpaw. Probably they'll go to find out."
"Would that be now?" Rainkit breathed. The two tomkit's necks almost cricked in their conquest to collectively stare at the apprentice den.

Reedkit marched out, looking imperious. He spoke apparently firmly to a retiring shadow behind him, who only slunk out after there was no sign of any other cat in the vicinity.

Rainkit kneaded the floor in silent fury.

Pebblepaw attempted to come after them, only to be cowed by Reedpaw. He backed into the den, and without further ado, the two brothers turned and strode lightly towards the gap in the sedge that was the exit. Well, Reedpaw strode lightly. Sparrowpaw just pressed himself to the floor and crawled like a bug which would be funny in other circumstances.

The three kits listened anxiously for their footsteps, and once they receded started murmuring (Thornkit) gasping (Graykit) and growling softly (Rainkit).
"Leaving without permission? To snoop on Eaglestar's business? " Graykit squeaked
"Eaglestar is just begging for a snooping," Rainkit said. "Out of all cats, *Fawnstar?* She's too sensible even if she sounds silly when she talks. "
"That doesn't mean they can watch!"
" Why are you so defensive?"
"Why are am *I* defensive? Why do you spend so much time with Sparrowpaw?"
" Because he's probably not okay in the head..... And don't tell him I told you." Rainkit deadpanned.
" .....Oh. Oh. Oh my Starclan. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have-"
"Why don't we all follow them?"

The two bickering kit's attention quickly snapped to Thornkit. He was peering idly into the cloudless sky and turned to look at them when they stared at him.
" Why don't we all follow them? They're already in trouble, so we won't be."
As thoughtful and firm Thornkit sounded, to an adult that would sound like the worst excuse ever made. It even beats 'The dog ate my homework, sir'. 'Oh, we just followed these two other significantly more sensible cats and since they did it first you can't do anything to us! ' Very smooth.

Too bad Rainkit and Graykit were kits, and bored and outraged kits make a terrible combination- maybe not for them, but certainly for the rest of the Clan(s).

◆◇◆

Rainkit stared at the currents in the monstrous river. The smallest was big enough to sweep them away, and she didn't really want to think about the biggest.

Graykit and Thornkit appeared to be having the same technical difficulties. They nosed around uncertainly in the tall,shadowy, wet grass and every now and then watched the river with some apprehension. They knew how to swim and were used to the feel of water, as there was a pool near the nursery in which they paddled every day. That patch of water didn't have strong kit-drowning currents or sudden terrifying waves that drenched them and sent them running for cover.

They had never been out of camp before. The security of many adults watching over you suddenly didn't seem like such a detestable thing after all. One of them voiced the problem that they were afraid to ask.
"How are we going to.." Thornkit let the question hang in the air.
Graykit squeaked when some water lapped at his paws. "I- I've heard Shadewater meow about some rocks in the river other Clan cats use to cross. But they're slippery and they're somewhere...."

"Here!" Rainkit triumphantly. Past a thick growth of weeds, a cleared spot showed the five stones that disrupted the even flow of the river. Water splashed against their sides and wet them every now and then. They were rather widely spaced for a kit.

Without prompting, Thornkit leaped gracelessly onto the first and yelped as he nearly fell sideways. He twisted- his paws scabbled and caught on the surface and he struggled up, tail swaying rigidly. His siblings only gaped, frozen through the entire ordeal. Graykit took more convincing and nimbly leapt across each without too much difficulty. He still proclaimed the journey as 'terrifying' and just pushed his nose into Thornkit's fur.

Now it was Rainkit's turn. While her brothers yelled supportively from the other side, she wondered exactly how she was supposed to land on the smooth surface without falling and being swept away with the fish.
Then she remembered why she came out here in the first place. If she tarried too long she would miss Eaglestar, and Reedpaw and *Sparrowpaw* would come back and see her, and the cats back at camp would yell for her and organize a searching patrol...

She jumped. .. and nearly overshot.
Her feet landed with a light *whump* on the first rock and she froze, staring the very close water and her front paws slowly started to slip sideways. Backing up for a firmer hold on the slimy stone, she jumped again and sorta *splat* against the second stone. The air whooshed out of her in a heartbeat and Thornkit and Graykit let out a strangled yelp.

The next rock she slipped and did a weird dance before managing to get a grip. After that it turned relatively uneventful and she reached the other side without too much mishap.

It occured to them that they had just left their home and were on Thunderclan territory. The trees shadowed everything and leered over the kits. The grass here was not as light and soft-edged as their own. Before long Graykit was whimpering and limping with cuts all over his pads, and they were forced to stop and lick them and awkwardly carry him as often as possible.

It was obvious that Thornkit felt miserable. He was the one who had decided on this far-fecthed journey to a destination they didn't even know how to get to, for something they may as well have missed. His head was drooping except when he was holding his brother and he just plodded along the border, hoping it would lead him there.
Rainkit was about to gloomily suggest they go back when something cracked a twig.

They all jumped and instinctively backed up until they were facing all directions.
There was no other sound except for the calling of a sparrow.
Rainkit's hackles suddenly rose- there was something profoundly

wrong about the sound- it was higher pitched and faster than normal.
" Run," she hissed, her ears flat.
Thornkit opened his mouth when a bush shuddered.
"Run! *RUN!*"

Nobody needed to be asked any more times. Graykit shot off in the direction that they had been plodding in, his paw complaints forgotten. Thornkit bolted after him so fast that he almost tread on his tail and Rainkit followed hot-foot until-

"Rainkit!" somebody called out . Her first instinct was to believe that it was Fawnstar or some similar adult who could save them from this hell, and immediately wheeled around and ran back to her former postion, feeling a little relieved. At least they'd be out of scary Thunderclan, and she'd never,ever go outside ever, never again...

Her relief got stepped on and thrown in the dirt as she looked into the cold face of
Reedpaw.

■ The Reuniting Fourth Chapter ■

◆◇◆

Shellshine was understatedly worried. Her daughter was alone. With a male around her age. And absolutely no protection from predators or rival patrols whatsoever.
Oh, the joys of being the overprotective mother.

She padded deftly after the patrol sent out to find the three kittens and the two apprentices. Her three kittens and her best friend's two apprentices. *Oh, what a mess.*

Eelstripe walked with a cold, grim expression next to her... no, not walked. He actually shouldered his way through some invisible undergrowth- those very nice shoulders worked forward with his paws. Thornkit had inherited the same gait...

Thornkit! I'll not ever see you again, the confident face, the heavy fur, the kittish innocence! How are you supposed to know the difference between a kind stranger and a kit-stealer, you're so naïve.. . Rainkit, you made friends with the rogue and look where it got you, my little fuzz-apple, smoothshell- who knows where he could have taken you, kitten? ... Graykit, your tininess could get you stepped on and overpowered so easily and there'll be no sweet young mackerel next to me ever again..

Shellshine inadvertently began to pray to Starclan as they walked on with no other sign of kit other than the scent trail. They had encountered no prints in the bank which meant either that they were still in the territory or had crossed through the stepping-stones rather than swam- at least there was a smaller chance that they drowned.

Thornkit, I'll never reprimand you if you curse the head of the fish... Rainkit, I'll never bother you to be friendly to Reedpaw...Graykit, I'll never make you sleep on the wet part of the moss...

She daintily lifted her feet as they padded by the riverside, and carefully poked each tuft of vegetation and scanned the water one last time before they resorted to swimming across. She looked up at the towering Eelstripe for reassurance, but he was still rigidly striding along and staring at whatever in front. She nudged him lightly, and he inched a bit closer so that they touched, but still looked firmly on ahead.

Shellshine's paw sunk deeply into the mud, and when she extricated it there was a fair amount still clinging on. As there was no time for fastidious tendencies, it didn't much bother her to do anything more than wipe it- until she noticed that there was some space under the foot in the mud before she squashed it.
Shellshine squinted at the dirt, and recognized two track of paws that were too large be a kit's, but were the right size for a couple of apprentices. Reedpaw and his brother surely - and where ever they had gone, the trio was sure to follow!

Eelstripe noticed that Shellshine had stopped and was standing with her legs akimbo, peering down at her left paw in the mud patch they were crossing. It wasn't an odd sight for a guy who's wife was a little bit weird, but it still needed some questioning in his distraught state.
"Shellshine." It was actually a question, but Eelstripe's voice was really flat.
"I found it! I found something! Tracks- a trail- paw marks!"

Petalflame, who had not gone on ahead too far and thus heard, wheeled back with her tail quivering. "Do you think--"
"Apprentice- size!"
She quickly snapped to action, and wheeled around again towards the general direction of the rest of patrol. "Dusklight, Shadewater! We found Reedpaw's and possibly Thornkit's tracks!"

"No, I think it's Reedpaw's brother, not Thornkit." Eelstripe immediately meowed in the same monotone.
Petalflame looked momentarily confused,but quickly covered it up as it wasn't good for a deputy to forget that sort of thing. "His brother would not go anywhere without the other, I'm guessing."
"I think he was named after an animal." Shellshine felt a small sliver of guilt through her mostly otherwise focused brain. What kind of a

cat was she, not being able remember the *name* of someone in her clan? For goodness' sake, she even knew about Fawnstar's favourite type of moss(lichen that grows on understream rocks)! Nothing could escape the great Shellshine! "Possibly a mo- *did you see that?*"

"Mama! *Mama*!"

Shellshine excitedly attempt to dolt forward, but her paw in the mud decided to be a stick in the mud and slipped out under her as she put pressure on it. She did a grade B+ bellyflop into the dirt and got very embarrassingly muddy - however, as her kits were standing there, she didn't give two cents about the situation and flopped back to her feet and fluffed out her fur, spattering dirt everywhere.
By the time that happened, Dusklight was already nuzzling her quietly dignified Reedpaw , who was carrying in sharp contrast a hissing, spitting, squirming Rainkit . He quietly lowered her to the ground, and as soon as he let go of her scruff she bolted for her mother and squeezed under her, ignoring the dirt plastered on her fur and wailing on about something- an eagle, Fawnstar, and '*nevernevernevernevernevernevergoingbackevereverevereveragainstupidThun*

Shellshine quietly bore her complaints and stored away a great lecture for later, as all mother are wont to do- she had the feeling that they could listen to it properly (in actuality no kit ever listens to a lecture no matter what their state) when their eyes weren't bloodshot and tails not dragging.
Graykit pushed his nose to her arm and Thornkit just sat quietly beside her, watching the floor passionlessly as Rainkit threaded under her belly with decreasing vigour.

Eelstripe picked up Graykit soundlessly. Shellshine's tail twitched when she peered at the underside of his paws- his pads were slightly swollen and marked with long scarlet stripes. She sniffed at them worriedly, leaned forward and murmured about Blazelight in his ear, and turned to attend to her other kits. She decided that Rainkit was the worse for wear and picked her up while Petalflame dutifully managed Thornkit. She gave a small grunt under his weight.

It was a relatively short walk to the camp considering the amount

of ground they had covered in total in their search of the missing. They'd been found considerably close to home- near the stepping stones which they probably walked across, as you may (not) remember- which the whole group was quite relieved to hear about. Their exhaustion had only opened up when the search was over. Even Petalflame, who strove to be a good example and had covered up her signs of tiredness, sighed through Thornkit's fur as they padded in a line through the reeds and into the center of the camp.

It was all a blur after that. Shellshine's strength drained rapidly as she stood near Fawnstar, who congratulated them, chided the kits and apprentices, and sent the latter off with a stern warning (and only then Shellshine realised that Reedpaw's mousy brother had magically appeared). She had then went to Graykit and licked his wounds before Blazelight dressed them and insisted that he sleep near his siblings.

Petalflame didn't even meticulously inspect her moss, just flopped down like a defeated trout and started snuffling. Shellshine had just recently returned to the warrior's den, as her kit's ceremony was only about three or so sunrises away.
She curled up with her head on the ground and front paws splayed beside it close to Eelstripe who carefully arranged himself to be as close as possible and flumped just like the deputy.

Kits were still such a mystery to her, even after having to share their joys in life as they toddled through it together-one with sleep-weary *I-have-witnessed-hell* eyes and the other with big and round dazzling ones. What was she saying? Oh, right.
It didn't make sense to her no-nonsense adult brain which could not comprehend that sometimes children were simply thoughtless.

Shellshine wasn't stirable when Rainkit crawled out of the nursery after feigning sleep, and walked carefully up to Sparrowpaw who touched noses after a nervous pause, and slowly began to thread his story, as he had promised.

◆◇◆

■ The Dramatic Fifth Chapter ■

◆◇◆

Rainkit nodded encouragingly as Sparrowpaw coughed a bit.

"You promised," she reminded him.

" Try as long sentences as you possibly can make, because that's always the way that elders tell a story." she mewed. He scrunched up his nose in distaste, but one look at her round eyes made him sigh and shake out his paws,and nervously look around once or twice.

He attempted to start multiple times before beginning:

"Umm, so, you know the part when we went out of the den to find out about Eaglestar. Before that, I, um, didn't sleep at all because I was scared of...something. Then Reedpaw-" Rainkit grunted- "- then Reedpaw said that if I wasn't sleeping we could go walk outside and he had something to show, I think. Uh... I didn't want to but he really made me and I went. He ate a thing or another and I told him about the warrior code and was like ' dear brother please whatever' so I shut up. We went out. '

' And then we skipped across the rocks and I almost sort of fell and we went through the territory and rolled in some garlic. Then Reedpaw knowed his way and we walked to Fourtrees, which is like a big tree divided into four bits. And Eaglestar and Fawnstar were standing and I said that it wasn't good to spy-" he coughed asthmatically -"- good to spy,and that it wasn't right to sit on Fourtrees if we weren't a leader and Starclan could be angry. And he said something or other. I dunno.'

Sparrowpaw closed his eyes while it started to drizzle. The clouds above were light,twirly and covered half the sky, which seemed to

watch the two as they crouched in the vast, densely clustered leaves of the renowned Fourtrees.

They were crouched above the place where the Windclan leader usually stood, downwind of Eaglestar and Fawnstar.

Sparrowpaw couldn't really bring himself to focus too much on their words, which were long and almost forcefully dramatic. It also didn't help that his rump had what felt like million of cuts from awkwardly tumbling through bracken because Reedpaw had forgotten the way and just ended up following rogue scent trails.
He had probably forgotten the risks and the dangers of leaving the territory. And the recurrent rage of the cats at Riverclan.
Reedpaw's flaw was probably that he either didn't think about it or took too long to think about it or thought about it a bad time.
In other words, he didn't consider his plans properly.

Sparrowpaw gave him a light poke in the side, and instinctively cowered when he snapped his head around to glare.
He had half a mind to say 'Why are we here?' in a very loud voice, but when his more authoritative brother looked at him square in he face, he ended up hissing, "Want to go home."

"Sparrowpaw, she's only a kit, and not at your level yet!" he mewed back urgently.

He stared at the side of his face in confusion.

"I'll tell you why if you stop questioning me." Reedpaw offered.
Sparrowpaw conveniently forgot about the two cavorting swallows down on the ground and nodded.

"It's about your friend," he mewed, his voice dropping a notch. " Her big brother was.. really mean to me."

Sparrowpaw started. Thornkit? But he wasn't a bully. Only a defender...
His eyes suddenly became flinty.

Reedpaw didn't seem to notice.

("Good!" Rainkit meowed in a fierce whisper. " He deserved it! He

needed it!")

A thought occured to him.
"How will this affect Thornkit?"

Reedpaw let out his breath in a long hiss and coincidentally Fawnstar chose that moment to raise her voice by an octave. "Eaglestar! This is the reason for convincing me to come? All the fabrications you have been whispering to me about so many urgent matters about our cats is only to gain my favour? "

Reedpaw and Sparrowpaw listened raptly. They were both expecting her to say something really puffed up. (If they were people, it would be something worthy of a medieval soap opera like "Back, you snake, you rogue! There is no place for gilded lies among the ears of my people!")

Eaglestar murmured a protest which, for some reason, actually made her speak like a normal cat.

"I'm not a newly accepted loner, Eaglestar, I am the leader of RiverClan. We live our lives governed by the age-old code which has shaped us for better or worse and you know that I don't have to repeat it word for word to get it into your head. We are both leaders of two different Clans full of cats, and the one she- cat you decided to fixate on most is the one you can't get no matter what you may say or do. Just let it go, there are better queens with less on their shoulders that you can chase."

Sparrowpaw and Reedpaw stared down through the leaves, then at each other. Sparrowpaw was beginning to realise how complicated girls could be.

Fawnstar had always seemed like that over dramatic single aunt at the family reunion that all the kids like to hang around because she's wacky and gives money at some point. The RiverClan cats treated her like one of the warriors because she was so basically unleaderlike, not especially commanding respect or looking majestic while sitting on a large rock framed by the sunset and waving reeds, while sighing to this cat who secretly is in love with them about their problems and stuff.

She gathered moss and helped Mapleclaw (while complaining of course). She grudgingly cleaned the elders of their ticks to get to listen to a story. She asked advice about her leadership problems and looked sympathetically annoyed whenever Moonfur complained about the toms and how they should improve their diet and groom themselves more often. She panicked whenever Graykit started crying around her about being hungry.

He couldn't guess whether or not it made her a bad leader.

She did try to solve the Clan's problems efficiently and took reports made by border patrols and complaints made by other cats rather seriously. It occurred to him that unlike other leaders that he had heard stories about Fawnstar was more oriented with the commoners of her Clan that they usually were.

She acted all dramatic and tinkly on purpose. It was just pretty much a part of her goofiness.

Thats it, Sparrowpaw realised. *She's a weirdly funny sort of cat.*

He then shook his head, pelting Reedpaw with drops of water. I *barely know her. Why am I being so analytic?*

He then thought about Fawnstar's words. *She's making it like a challenge. Telling him to let it go and stuff. Won't that make him want to more?*

*What if she **likes** the attention?*

He put a wet paw to his forehead, ears flattened and eyes scrunched up. Reedpaw looked at him consolingly. " Girls are weird, huh?"

Sparrowpaw grunted.

This was stupid and he wanted to go home and just leave it all behind. This was breaking the warrior code and they hadn't even learned anything about it other than Eaglestar having a crush on Fawnstar who was not amazingly actually stupid. The other warriors could be waking up and beginning to realize their absence.

Reedpaw appeared to be able to sense his discomfort and his eyes

narrowed warningly. His brother looked at him defiantly back.

"If I can pass on this really actually valuable information to Rainkit's brother Thornkit in a more modified way, then he will probably tell his brother Graykit who cannot keep a secret and will so tell the Clan that Thornkit spied on these two leaders." Reedpaw hissed lowly, the drumming of the heavy rain almost fizzling out his words.

"That's just evil," Sparrowpaw suddenly seemed to puff up, his tail rising and his chin tucked in to his chest, as he had a sudden small explosion in his chest of anger which had even at first surprised him. The consequences and the way Reedpaw was just brushing them off for some insults seemed to ignite him- imagining Rainkit's distress seemed to ignite him.

"You'd be ruining so many other cats! Eelstripe and Shellshine and Rainkit and Graykit and Thornkit and even Fawnstar and you'd hurt the RiverClan opinion of ThunderClan even more. Are you a Clan cat, Reedpaw, or are you a fox hearted rogue? What kind of a brother does this? Should we all just dub you Tigerclaw and touch our foreheads fearfully to your overblown feet in terror?"

Reedpaw blinked.

Sparrowpaw slowly made his fur lie flat, still holding his gaze. He had never said such a long big speech ever before without feeling winded, and yet there he was, staring down his brother in this out of nowhere fit of fury. The depth of his feelings confused him.

It also confused Reedpaw who for once didn't have anything to immediately say. He wasn't used to Sparrowpaw standing up for himself.

However, he did recover at some point. "Maybe I didn't think."

This made Sparrowpaw drop his ears, looking puzzled. Reedpaw admitting?

Reedpaw just swiftly lifted his haunches off the tree branch, pausing to groom himself briefly and glance down at the leaders,

who had already disbanded. " Lets go," he said shortly."I will not be asking for you to come with me again, Sparrowpaw. This was a mistake."

He smoothly dropped down the tree onto the slick grass below , and a now bumbling Sparrowpaw made his way down as well. Reedpaw began to immediately walk in front with his tail held neutrally as if nothing of importance had happened and headed back into the forest, following the scent trail of the two leaders.

Sparrowpaw looked up as the trees appeared to close in above his head and wrap them in a gradually oppressive quiet filled with only rustling leaves, attempting to distract himself. These trees weren't like the willows of own home territory which seemed like queenly elders. These felt like disapproving senior warriors. He supposed that ThunderClan liked their strong personality.

He brushed past a blob of bracken when all of a sudden there was a wail, echoing through the trees.

Sparrowpaw jumped, whirling around, and frantically pressed his back to a tree, beginning to feel the paralyzing fear of remembering his nightmares. This felt just like one; large towering trees, darkness, and screams. He realized that Reedpaw had disappeared and his imagination immediately began to sketch a picture of him falling into a hole, him getting mauled to death, badgers, foxes, Twolegs, dogs-

And then Reedpaw burst through a berry bush, scattering dead leaves and causing Sparrowpaw to shriek and jump a foot in the air. He stopped in front of his brother, panting.

Sparrowpaw realised that he had a dropped a bundle to the ground.

His heart began to hammer again and his vision tunneled. He considered trying to ram himself into a tree to escape this sudden onslaught of nightmare. "Is she dead?" he croaked.

"No," said Reedpaw shortly. " She was trying to sneak in after us and she fainted at some point. You watch the kit. I get the others."

Reedpaw whirled around and sprinted back through the way he came. Sparrowpaw stared after his retreating tail blankly, then turned to look at Rainkit. He crept over and poked her awkwardly.

He jumped back when she leapt to her feet, her pupils dilated in fear, tail twitching and fur all puffed up. She stared uncomprehendingly at Sparrowpaw, who stared back stupidly.

"R-Reedpaw?" she squeaked. "Ah-dh-dh-thing-"

Looking at her being all tiny and more scared than he was, Sparrowpaw had this sudden strange feeling in his chest as if somebody had put something warm there that had melted and spread its warmth everywhere, like someone had spilled honey. He forgot that he was wet and the trees were menacing and the wind was cold and his fur lay flat and his ears swiveled forward.

"It's Sparrowpaw," he mewed. "Unless you want me to call Reedpaw.."

"*No,*" she said quickly.

Some silence.

"Um. Nice to meet you." He squinted up at the sky visible. "Good weather we're having."

"Yeah."

More silence.

Rainkit abandoned all pretense and rushed forwards towards Sparrowpaw, forcing herself between his paws and staring up into his face plaintively. " *I haaaaate* Reedpaw," she complained. " I was like, just looking for you and stuff 'cause you went away and Thornkit and Graykit *accidentally* followed and we got *accidentally* in ThunderClan. And we runned-"

"Ran," Sparrowpaw corrected.

" *Ranned* a lot and Reedpaw said," -here she puffed herself up and tucked her chin into her chest and assumed a comically deep tone- "

You're a dumb old kit and stuff. I was like *no*."

"Okay," said Sparrowpaw, unsure of what else to say. He was pretty sure that was glowing with the warmness by now.

Rainkit settled next to him. " And now you have to promise me something."

Sparrowpaw suddenly froze up. "Um. What?"

Rainkit scratched the back of her ear. "You got me in so much trouble."

"You followed..."

"It's a perfectly sane thing to remember that if you sneak out a kit will see and follow you, duh."

"Um."

"It's just a small promise."

Sparrowpaw rolled his eyes.

"Okay, see, when we get back," her face assumed a serious expression, "You tell me your side of the story."

Sparrowpaw thought of the shortest way possible, as there was to be no way of wriggling out of this. "Okay."

"Okay."

Just then, in ridiculously good timing, Reedpaw exploded through the undergrowth, fairly dragging two hissing kits that looked pretty much exactly like one another, except one was rather large and one was rather small. Sparrowpaw noticed that Reedpaw wore a harassed expression remarkably like Dusklight's when he and his brother used to nag her for fish.

Thornkit and Graykit suddenly took a bounding leap towards their sister and surrounded her on both sides, muscling away Sparrowpaw. Rainkit looked sort of alarmed as they flooded her

with words.

"Rainkit, did he h-"

"Did he do anyth-"

"Were you-"

"We ran and then-"

"Didn't mean to leave y-"

"Is Sparr-"

"Are yo-"

"We nee-"

"Hear, hear," interrupted Rainkit. " I'm fine. And Sparrow's nice."

"Um. Very nice."

Thornkit looked at him.

Then they both stepped back from their sister, both eyeballing Reedpaw distrustfully. Sparrowpaw actually felt a little sorry for him.

Reedpaw looked from Sparrowpaw to Thornkit, Graykit, and then Rainkit, who narrowed her yellow eyes at him defiantly. His gaze seemed to linger on her a while before narrowing his own and dropping it to his paws. He hadn't ever looked so sorry before with his fur all raggedy and stuck to his body.

"Hey," said Sparrowpaw, and stood up. " How about we all go?"

"Yeah," mumbled Rainkit and Reedpaw at the same time, and glared at each other.

From then one, there wasn't talking as they just silently threaded through the forest, thanking StarClan that no patrol had found them yet. The ground began to lighten and the trees thinned as they approached the border, and Sparrowpaw breathed in the scents of

the river and his home with relief. It burbled innocently and smoothed over the rocks and the reeds, and they skipped over the stepping stones without much mishap.

Reedpaw stopped all of a sudden. " I hear a patrol."

Before any cat had time to react, he scooped up Rainkit who immediately began protesting loudly and fairly strutted into the midst of the patrol, making his expression as winsome as possible.

Sparrowpaw caught an eye-roll sent his way from Thornkit.

◆◇◆

"There."

Sparrowpaw felt as if he had been spitting on about this story for a hundred moons. His throat certainly did feel like that.

Rainkit yawned. "Super nice story." She then gently toppled forward and would have ended up with her face in the dust if Sparrowpaw hadn't quickly caught her scruff. " You have to sleep," he mumbled.

Rainkit grunted.

Sparrowpaw had to haul her to the nursery, where he deposited her with Thornkit and Graykit. She yawned and attempted to chew his paw.

He gently shook himself free and left the warmth wistfully, entering the apprentice den and sidestepping Volepaw to tuck himself into the corner which did certainly look more comfortable than ever. Reedpaw had typically curled himself up in the middle of everycat.

Sparrowpaw shook his paws out before curling them to his chest, with the last thought he had before he fell asleep was that he had forgotten his poppy seeds, and then the actual last thought being that he didnt need them.

◆◇◆